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## ORIGINAL SIN AND GOD'S JUSTICE

(Translated from the French<sup>1</sup> by B. Dickinson)

The doctrine of original sin often raises a difficult problem in some minds: How can a just God allow every man to be a victim for the offence of a remote ancestor? Having sought to establish the precise nature of original sin according to Scripture,<sup>2</sup> there remains the question whether the Scriptural account leaves room for resolving or lightening this objection, which seems a shocking one for many. The fact is that the Biblical authors did not dwell upon this question. But if they have no ready-made solution to offer us, almost all of them have strongly maintained the principle that divine retribution is just. Some of them have even outlined its application to problems akin to the one just stated. Now, even when we are expounding Biblical theology, and taking care to distinguish methodically the analysis of the Scriptural *datum* from the systematic development of the *data* thus compiled, there still remains the possibility of pointing out certain indications which the speculative theologian must take into account.

If Israel's faith was for a long time satisfied with a conception of justice that made it merely approximate and applying to social groups, families and nations rather than to individuals, yet the inspired testimonies to this faith nowhere lost sight of the individual completely. Almost every book of the Bible contains, if not the precise formula, 'God will render to every man according to his works,'<sup>3</sup> at least some

<sup>1</sup> Any article appearing in translation from another language has been written specially for *Scripture*, and is not a reprint from a foreign periodical unless this is explicitly stated.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> The present article is the conclusion of a series of studies devoted to original sin in Scripture, the principal being: 'Original sin in Genesis,' in the *Revue Biblique*, 64 (1957), pp. 5-34; 'Original sin in St Paul,' in the *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 40 (1956), pp. 213-54.

<sup>3</sup> The formula 'God will render to every man according to his works' is found with slight variations in the following texts: Jer. 17:10, 32:19; Ps. 62:13; Prov. 24:12; Job 34:11; Sir. 16:12-14, 35:24; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; 1 Pet. 1:17; Apoc. 2:23, 20:12-13, 22:12. It is applied solely to an individual or to a specific category in the following texts: 2 Sam. 3:39; Jer. 25:14; Zach. 1:6; Ps. 18:21, 28:4; Lam. 3:64; 2 Cor. 11:15; 2 Tim. 4:14; Apoc. 18:6. The same idea can also be found under slightly different forms in 1 Sam. 2:30, 26:23; Isaías 59:18; Jer. 50:15 and 29; Abd. 15; Ps. 18:26-7; Qoh. 12:14; Sir. 11:26 (G); John 5:29; Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:5. It underlies countless affirmations of divine justice.

indications of a conviction that there is a providential justice for individuals, even in periods when the idea of collective retribution still predominated.<sup>1</sup>

The references one could list are inevitably rather blurred in their outlines. They pass imperceptibly from statements of belief in collective justice to those which concern individual justice. For example, in certain cases in which punishment descends upon a guilty man and not upon the whole nation, there still remains the aftermath of collective retribution, since the clan is implicated in the fate of its chief; such was the case of Core, of Dathan and Abiron, or of Achan.<sup>2</sup>

During the period of exile, two prophets formulated explicitly what until then had been more or less clearly glimpsed. They asserted in the most formal way the individual character of God's sanctions. Jeremias and Ezechiel protest against the proverb that passed from mouth to mouth among their contemporaries: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and their children's teeth have been set on edge' (Jer. 31:29; Ezech. 18:2). Both proclaim that in future each man will suffer only the penalty for his own sins. On the one hand this categoric teaching carries to its peak the opposition between the demands of justice and the fact of the solidarity for sin's burden from generation to generation. But, on the other hand, it allows it to be completely dissolved, since it defers to the future the recompense for each man's merits. Without denying the evidence of experience, it

<sup>1</sup> Abimelech pleads his good faith that he may not be punished by God for an unwitting offence (Gen. 20:4-7). Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom because of the just men it contains (Gen. 18:25). The plague of hail spares those Egyptians who listened to Moses (Ex. 9:19-21); Moses is spared in the threatened destruction of the people (Ex. 32:10; Num. 14:12; Deut. 9:14). The general punishment of the murmurers makes an exception of Caleb and Josuah (Num. 14:20-4, 30-1). The law provides that only the guilty should be put to death (Deut. 24:16). Rahab escapes the general condemnation of Jericho (Jos. 6:25). Abimelech dies because of his wickedness (Judges 9:56-7). Ruth is rewarded for her fidelity.

The sons of Heli are killed in battle by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:17). Saul loses the crown which is given to one more worthy (1 Sam. 15:28). David feels that he ought to be punished personally for his offence (2 Sam. 24:17). The young son of Jeroboam is the only one to be given a proper burial, because he is the only one in his family who is good (1 Kings 14:13). A foreigner, the widow of Sarepta, for her charity to Elias is saved from the famine, and she obtains the raising to life of her son (1 Kings 17:11-24). Josias, because he did penance once the law was discovered, is allowed to die before the national catastrophe (2 Kings 22:19-20). Joakim will have neither tomb nor successor on the throne, because of his hostility to Jeremias (Jer. 36-30). The false prophet Hananias is struck down with premature death because he preached the revolt against Yahweh (Jer. 28:17).

<sup>2</sup> Num. 16:25-32; Jos. 7:24. Even in the cases noted above (n. 2) a similar mingling of collective and individual retribution can be seen. David chooses to allow his people to be decimated by plague and only then fully acknowledges that he should be punished personally (2 Sam. 24:12-17). Joakim is punished with his descendants and his people (Jer. 36:31).

maintains that this does not constitute the last word on the part of Providence.

It is illuminating to make a rapid survey of the vicissitudes of this reflection on the theme of retributive justice launched by the two prophets. Although neither of them disputed the truth of the fact expressed by the saying which they condemned (cf. Jer. 32:18; Ezech. 21:8), some thinkers believed it was possible to maintain that suffering was in every case the punishment of a previous personal sin. This stern theory was introduced into the Bible, only to be vigorously contested there in the book of Job or by Qoheleth: the evils suffered by the innocent are a tragic reality which cannot be dismissed by any *a priori* theory.

Eventually the disparity between each man's fate and his merits, which had long been a scandal to pious minds, was seen to be provisional. A psalmist, having described his painful astonishment at the situation, makes known the thought that ultimately appeased him: swift disaster is due to bring to nothing the arrogant triumph of the godless. Moreover the believer has the supreme happiness of being always with his God (Ps. 73)—and we may well wonder if this soaring phrase refers to the life to come or is restricted to the joy which the divine presence gives here below.<sup>1</sup> The fact remains that they prepared the ground for the teaching of the book of Wisdom, which assigns to the next life the retribution due from Providence.<sup>2</sup>

In the eyes of this late writer the evils which afflict the just—premature death or even violent death under persecution—are nothing by comparison with the eternal life promised to those who remain faithful: they are but the ordeal which singles out those who are worthy of God (Wis. 3:1-9). The anomaly created by the prosperity of thugs and the misery of their victims is of brief duration: death will come to redress the balance and take them into a world where Providence will carry out its plans for man.

Clearly the author is taking an extreme case, but one that is useful as an example. He wished to embody his idea in a concrete form, rather than argue from a statement of abstract principles. For him each man (even the just man who has the happiness of living to a ripe old age, a case he does not mention) must ultimately reap according to his works, not here below, but after death. This will be a simple

<sup>1</sup> For a recent discussion on this point, see R. Martin-Achard, *De la mort à la résurrection d'après l'Ancien Testament*, 1956, pp. 127-33. In this book can be found, in a general way, many complementary points on this subject, which has been briefly dealt with in this article. See especially pp. 165-70 on God's justice.

<sup>2</sup> Consult M. J. Lagrange, 'Le livre de la Sagesse. Sa doctrine des fins dernières,' in *Revue Biblique* (1907), pp. 85-104; R. Schuetz, *Les idées eschatologiques du livre de la Sagesse*, 1935.

summons for the just, who will enjoy the vision of God, but the beginning of terrifying unhappiness for the godless.<sup>1</sup>

After the prolonged gropings of wise men, the latest among them brings a decisive light to bear by placing the realisation of individual retribution beyond our present earthly existence, whereas the two contemporary prophets of the exile, Jeremias and Ezechiel, had promised this retribution in an indefinite future. The principle that God will render to every man according to his works, which had been included from the beginning in Israel's creed, is still maintained, but freed from the naïve applications that had been made of it. The lessons of experience had compelled them to transfer the showing-forth of divine justice, promised by the prophets, to regions beyond the confines of experience. Wisdom showed a way of reconciling two *data* which until then had remained in an unresolved state of tension: it combined a daring hope with the recognition of injustice in this world.

Yet Wisdom did not diagnose the whole range of evil suffered by humanity, for it did not envisage explicitly an original and universal sin, a true separation from God, that is independent of the individual will. It simply furnishes a framework capable of containing, without detracting from the justice of Providence, a datum that will be brought into full light by St Paul.

The Christian can afford to be more pessimistic, in a way, than the author of Job or The Preacher. For, far from disputing the facts disclosed by the wise men of old, the Christian imputes to them a gravity almost unguessed at before. In his eyes every man, as a consequence of an offence he has not committed, has to undergo not only an impairing of his happiness but a real deterioration in his religious status. Physical or psychic sufferings, moral errors or difficulties are somehow linked with a sinful stain that truly defiles each one of us. The enduring consequence of this is a moral helplessness—at least in part—and often also a tormented conscience.

Such a doctrine provides a definite framework for a valid description and explanation of our miserable state; but it does not leave God's justice in the clear. For if the free-willed offence of the creature is put forward as the source of evil, then the scandal of a tainted inheritance being passed down from one generation to another takes on far greater proportions, since it is a question not merely of unhappiness but of sin. The sour grapes eaten by the fathers are seen to be infinitely

<sup>1</sup> Beside the essential contribution made by this book, which is the doctrine of everlasting life, may be found in passing the idea that divine justice takes everyone's personal status into account: 'to him that is little, mercy is granted: but the mighty shall be mightily tormented' (Wis. 6:7).

more harmful to their children than the contemporaries of Jeremiah and Ezechiel suspected. The problem the two prophets had to face is made more painful. It has to be solved, along the lines of thought defined by them and extended to a future life by the book of Wisdom. It must be solved, not by the mentality that harks back to causes in the past, but by the hope of a just judgement that is to come.

### *The New Testament*

Of all books of the Bible, there is none that presents all the refinements of divine justice in a brighter light than the book which resounds with the Good News of grace. In harmony with the teaching that culminated in the book of Wisdom, Jesus teaches that persecution, with its deadly perils, is not to be feared. It can have only limited effects: it can kill the body, but cannot reach the soul. In the midst of all dangers the hairs of our head are numbered.<sup>1</sup> What is beyond man's power to estimate does not escape God's precise knowledge and will be subject to an exacting judgement. Divine retaliation will deal out a faithful reckoning.<sup>2</sup> The Son of Man, the judge heralded by the prophet Daniel, is destined to come in his glory, to render to every man according to his works. He will give no credit for the artfulness by which one has contrived to keep alive in times of trouble, or for such apparent successes as the conquest of an empire.<sup>3</sup>

God reads hearts and it may well be, as in the case of the Pharisees, that what seems glorious in men's eyes is an abomination in God's eyes.<sup>4</sup> But on the last day the sifting of values, impossible now for men to attempt, will be infallibly accomplished by the hands of angels.<sup>5</sup> Jesus teaches that true guilt is contracted by the breaking of the commandments dictated by the heart's own choice, not by chance external contacts that are unavoidable.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he teaches that transgressions themselves will by no means be judged from an abstract rule of morality, but from the concrete possibilities offered to each by the gifts he has in fact received. The judgement pronounced on Sodom, that typical example of pagan corruption, will be more lenient than the judgement falling upon those towns in Galilee which rejected the tidings of salvation in the days of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> All that was lacking to convert Tyre and Sidon, as the Ninivites were converted by the threats of Jonas, was the working of the miracles that had been lavished on

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 10:28-30; Luke 12:4-7 (cf. 21:18)

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 10:32-3; Luke 12:8-9; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26 (cf. Matt. 7:1; Mark 4:24; Luke 6:38)

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 16:27 (cf. 25:31-46; Dan. 7:13-14)

<sup>4</sup> Luke 16:15 (cf. Matt. 23:28)

<sup>5</sup> This is the conclusion of the parable of the cockle (Matt. 13:41)

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 10:15, 11:24; Luke 10:12

Bethsaida and Corozain : therefore the gentile towns will receive far greater clemency in the day of judgement.<sup>1</sup> Then, perhaps after long delays, 'the servant who knew his master's will, and did not make ready for him or act according to that will, will receive many strokes of the lash ; he who did not know of it, yet earned a beating by his conduct, will have only a few. Much will be asked of the man to whom much has been given ; more will be expected of him, because he was entrusted with more' (Luke 12:47-8). That is why each one will be judged according to his words—so that he may be justified or condemned according to what he knew of the divine law.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the final reckoning of accounts, those who have put the same energies into increasing their capital, that differed originally according to individuals, will receive the same reward, according to the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:20-3). Those who originally received the same capital will receive a reward proportioned to the energy expended in increasing its value, according to the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:16-19). Idle inertia will be punished. Even when a gratuitous generosity seems to prevail, careful consideration will reveal a justice that is more exact than that of human payments, one which takes account of intentions. The proprietor of the vineyard will give the same wage to all his workers once evening comes. Those who, in spite of their good will, have found employment only at a late hour, will receive a *denarium* equally with those who have worked from early morning (Matt. 20:1-15).

These manifold parables suggest and finally establish the conception of a justice that is strict, meticulous, yet not niggardly. It is a justice which takes into account the initial conditioning of our free-willed activity by temperament, social background, by every kind of circumstance which allows or prevents access to the common economy of salvation.

*St Paul* This Gospel teaching finds an echo in St Paul. God is the just judge (2 Tim. 4:8), whose judgement is just towards both persecutors and their victims (2 Thess. 1:5-7). When judgement is delivered it is unerring against those who do evil (Rom. 2:2). God 'has no human preferences,' that is to say, he is not influenced by considerations of race<sup>3</sup> or class.<sup>4</sup> He renders to every man according to his works : a statement which at first sight gives the idea of external works, open to human observation (Rom. 2:6-8), an idea which must soon be modified. We must, in fact, take into consideration the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 11:21-2 ; Luke 10:13-14

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 12:37 (cf. 25:26-7 ; Luke 19:22 ; John 5:45-6)

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 2:11 ; Gal. 2:6

<sup>4</sup> Eph. 6:9 ; Col. 3:25



varying knowledge of the law possessed by different individuals : 'those who have been sinners without regard to the law will be doomed without regard to the law ; those who have been sinners with the law for their rule will be judged with the law for their rule' (Rom. 2:12). This personal equation is an essential element in the divine judgement, and Paul insists on the increased responsibility of one who claims to have the light : the consequence is that he condemns himself in approving of (Rom. 14:22) or in condemning another (Rom. 2:1). Paul himself had been a persecutor in former days ; but he was acting in ignorance, and had been able to obtain mercy (1 Tim. 1:13). 'Without the law sin is not imputed,' St Paul goes so far as to say (Rom. 5:13), in a formula which is oversimplified and calls for certain distinctions. For side by side with the external promulgation of the law of Moses there is the secret writing of his law made by God in the hearts of pagans (Rom. 2:14-15). The existence of this interior law, which is liable to wide variations in its certitude as well as in its practical applications, makes present judgement impossible : judgement is reserved for the future (Rom. 12:19). One day the Lord will make manifest the secret intentions which at present are still hidden in the hearts of each man.<sup>1</sup> For the time being the Christian cannot attempt to judge those outside the fold, Jews or pagans (1 Cor. 5:13), because whatever the law says is addressed to those who are under the law (Rom. 3:19), and we cannot make it bind univocally those who do not know it.

Side by side with this doctrine that judgement varies according to works, there are other doctrines which at first give a very different impression. As so often happens in the Bible, Paul sets out one after another seemingly divergent truths, without immediately reconciling them. So there are acts of God that are determined by prevenient grace and not by a concern for rendering justice to each one.

Among the people of Israel in Paul's day there were some who recognised in Jesus the Saviour heralded by the prophets ; just as in the days of Elias seven thousand men had remained faithful to the true God : 'So it is in our time : a remnant has remained true ; grace has chosen it. And if it is due to grace, then it is not due to observance of the law ; if it were, grace would be no grace at all' (Rom. 11:5-6). And what is true of Israel is equally true of the pagans, among whom a certain number had been called to salvation in Christ : 'Yes, it was grace that saved you, with faith for its instrument ; it did not come from yourselves, it was God's gift, not from any action of yours, or there would be room for pride.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 4:4-5 ; Rom. 2:16

<sup>2</sup> Eph. 2:8-9 (cf. Gal. 2:16 ; Rom. 3:28 ; Titus 3:5 ; 2 Tim. 1:9)

In these passages, when the Apostle rates so highly the action of divine grace that is independent of man's works, he is not treating of the judgement which will determine the lot of every man on the last day, but with the call to a privileged state: the possession of the Christian faith. The fact that some receive this gift and others do not does not depend on the greater or less perfection of works that have already been accomplished. The distinction is made solely by favour of God, who is not accountable to anyone. This fact is perfectly compatible with a final judgement that has for criterion the use that will be made of the gifts received. Paul goes on to make this very point, teaching that the faithful are 'created in Jesus Christ, pledged to such good actions as he has prepared beforehand to be the employment of our lives' (Eph. 2:10).

It is in this perspective that we must see the predilection and the hardening of heart discussed in the ninth chapter of Romans. Among Abraham's descendants, in the course of successive generations, grace again makes its own choice. The covenant is not automatically entailed to one family or race. God chose between Isaac and Ismael, between Jacob and Esau. He shows mercy to whom He will and He hardens His heart where He will, as is clear from the Scripture that tells of Moses and Pharaoh. He finds His glory in His opponents as well as in His servants. Nothing can resist His will. God is as free in His dealings with men as the potter is when he 'pulls' from the same clay, vessels that are intended for different uses. The thing made cannot question the decisions of the maker (Rom. 9:20-1). This was the classic metaphor among the Jews to express the creation of man by God<sup>1</sup> and especially God's sovereign liberty *vis-à-vis* His creatures.<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Jeremias, when making use of this comparison, sought to emphasise something other than an independence that was not answerable to anyone. In his eyes, the clay that was malleable before being fired in the kiln represented the divine action that was always susceptible to modification according to human action. The divine 'repenting' corresponds to man's conversion and, contrariwise, the unfaithfulness of a nation entails the suppression of blessings that had already been granted.<sup>3</sup> There is indeed a divine intention which often precedes man's decision, but this does not cancel the operation of a final just retribution.

Doubtless when Paul speaks of Moses and Pharaoh he has not the same end in view as Jeremias when he reflects on the work of the

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 2:7; Is. 64:7; Job 10:9, 33, 36

<sup>2</sup> Is. 29:16, 45:9. Paul takes the words of the first text according to the Septuagint literally, and draws inspiration from the second. cf. again Sir. 33:13; Wis. 15:7 (which is not applied to the divine operation); 2 Tim. 2:20.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. 18:1-10 (cf. 26:13, 19; Zach. 1:3; Mal. 3:7)



potter. For the moment his attention is centred on the place allotted to each man in the visible economy of salvation. This is determined by the almighty will of the Lord; but that does not prejudice the eternal destiny that is reserved to everyone in proportion to his conduct.<sup>1</sup> Paul clearly taught that the just judgement to come would be based on the free-willed use men made of the gifts they had received. He could have no difficulty therefore in distinguishing on these lines between a situation that was favourable or unfavourable according to the official regime of revelation and, on the other hand, the value of any human person in God's sight.<sup>2</sup> Earlier in the Epistle he had, in fact, contrasted the professed Jew, circumcised in his flesh, and the Jew-at-heart who is praised not by men but by God (Rom. 2:29). He has even expressly envisaged the paradoxical case in which a persecutor of the chosen people, such as Pharaoh, would be acting in good faith. He himself, one-time blasphemer and executioner of the first disciples, has obtained mercy because of his ignorance: an example of God's patience towards them that believe (1 Tim. 1:13-16). Hence election by grace and judgement according to works are not mutually exclusive, because they are not bound up with the same stages of salvation. We can even perceive sometimes how an election by grace rough hews, not of course the final judgement, but an approximate shaping of justice that holds promise for the future. Paul, in spite of his sinful past, was received into the life of grace, excused as he was by his ignorance. And Cornelius, the Roman centurion, won by his prayers and alms the grace of hearing the Gospel preaching (Acts 10:4, 31-5).

*The divine novitiate* Having indicated the Scriptural evidences that highlight the delicate precision of the divine judgement and its universal application, it is now as well to consider different ideas. In this way new points of view on the problem of the justice of Providence will emerge, which a systematic doctrine of original sin will

<sup>1</sup> M. J. Lagrange writes: 'He (Paul) is discussing God's call to a position that is privileged in the order of salvation. . . . We must not apply to the eternal moral destiny of an individual what is said of his action in history' (*Épître aux Romains*, 1916, pp. 246-7). In the same way a Protestant commentator, E. Gaugler, writes: 'It concerns solely the role of the ruler in the history of salvation, it has nothing to do with this man's personal fate at the judgement' (*Der Römerbrief*, II, 1952, p. 53; quoted by O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 1955, p. 209, n. 3).

<sup>2</sup> This is disputed by a recent commentator, O. Michel: 'It is difficult to maintain any distinction between the historic role to which God assigns any man and the eternal judgement that is passed on him' (op. cit., p. 209). Unfortunately there is no evidence to support this denial. On the other hand the distinction in question is found in the words of our Lord on Sodom, Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 10:15, 11:21-4; Luke 10:13-15), and in the parable of the labourers at the eleventh hour (Matt. 20:1-16), not to mention Paul.

have to take into account. The Biblical writers, faced with the inexpressible mystery of God, liked to multiply understatements, without binding themselves to a single statement which might be considered exhaustive. It would therefore be imprudent to fasten on any principle, even one drawn from a large number of texts, without considering closely whether there may not be a complementary principle which compels us to tone down the application of the first. Side by side with the rather rough justice which is shown in this present life and side by side with the perfect justice which is promised in the future life, Scripture speaks of a divine intention to test men and to instruct them.

More than any other book in the Bible, Genesis strives to show how the consequences of an ancestor's conduct make themselves felt in his descendants.<sup>1</sup> There is a certain justice in this, which must not be denied, even if its collective character prevents it from being fully satisfying. The theology of original sin proceeds readily along this line of thought which sees the present determined by the past. However, in this same book of Genesis, which is continually dedicated to showing that suffering is the penalty for sin, we are offered the most striking illustration of the idea that is completely foreign to this dominant theme: the temptation of Abraham (Gen. 22). The excruciating obligation of immolating his beloved son that is imposed upon the patriarch is not connected with the expiation of a previous offence. It is a test to which God subjects His faithful servant before ratifying the promises which He had already made him.

This idea of a test reappears from time to time in the Biblical books.<sup>2</sup> It underlies the story of Job, although the word itself is never spoken. It offers a religious explanation of suffering that differs from the more usual one, which considers it to be the punishment for an offence. The book of Job sets out to contest the universal validity of this common theory. Sometimes this idea of a test is extended to a wider field. So a meditation on the vicissitudes of the sojourn in the desert after leaving Egypt (Deut. 8) sees in all the hardships undergone by Israel the effect of a fatherly solicitude: Yahweh intended both to test His people—that is, to see whether they would keep His commandments or not—and also to train them as a father trains his son. The privation imposed by circumstances taught them a lesson which they could not have learned otherwise, forcibly weaning them from a gratification that had become habitual, to give them a new and better

<sup>1</sup> The different peoples or tribes are usually connected with an ancestor from whom they take both their name and their distinctive character.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. 15:25, 16:4, 20:20; Deut. 13:4, 33:8; 2 Chron. 32:31; Pss. 17:3, 26:2, 66:10; Tob. 12:14; Sir. 2:1-6, 4:17; Wis. 3:5-6

gratification, thus increasing their confidence in a Providence so rich in resources.<sup>1</sup>

This kind of suffering, which is both test and teaching in one, can be the result of sin: it is then, in addition, a punishment. These three themes are combined in the prologue to the book of Judges. The continuing existence of the ancient inhabitants of Canaan among the newly settled Israelites was at one and the same time (a) a punishment for neglecting to expel them, (b) a providential opportunity for testing the fidelity of the Chosen People and (c) a means of training the younger generation in warfare (Judges 2:20-3:6).

This combination, made in a particular case, cannot be given the value of a universal principle, in the sense that all suffering which serves as a test or a lesson must always stem from sin. Such a principle is not valid in the case of an isolated individual. It was rejected in the most categorical way by the book of Job and by The Preacher. Experience shows that any man may be faced with suffering without having deserved it through his own fault.

Even when we consider large groups or humanity taken as a whole, we cannot commit ourselves to a hard-and-fast generalisation. No doubt, by and large, a collective group considered during a certain period of time meets the fate it deserves more consistently than an individual: for in the long run chance events compensate one another. Yet even on this global scale there are exceptions: Ps. 44 denies that the current national crisis is the effect of national infidelity.

The Bible, then, looks to other ideas than that of the punishment of sin to explain suffering and does not always connect them with the idea of penal vindictive justice. From the very nature of our creatureliness we are undergoing a test in which our freedom may let us down, but in which hardship can become an occasion for progress. This must call for circumspection in any theology of original sin, or rather of original justice. To describe the state which preceded the fall, Genesis limits itself to a few very restrained suggestions. Their restraint appears much more marked by comparison with the wealth of detail furnished by the apochryphal writings at the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to go further than the inspired book and to reconstruct a mental picture of the state of original innocence

<sup>1</sup> The metaphor of the crucible in which metals are purified expresses both the idea of a test and that of education, sometimes even the idea of punishment: Is. 48:10; Jer. 6:20-30, 9:6; Ezech. 22:17; Mal. 3:3; Zach. 13:9; Ps. 66:10; Prov. 17:3; Wis. 3:6; 1 Peter 1:7. The idea of a painful education is also found in Prov. 3:11-12; Ps. 119:71; Sir. 6:18-26.

<sup>2</sup> Details on this point may be found in F. R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin* (1903, ch. vi-x) or in J. Bonsirven, *Le judaïsme palestinien au temps de Jésus-Christ* (1935, II, pp. 12-18).

#### THE DATE OF THE LAST SUPPER

by removing the limitations and sufferings of our present state, as if they could only be the result of a primitive offence. For the Bible gives no authority for accepting such a principle.

If now we must sum up the conclusions which emerge from the analysis we have made so far, we can say that Scripture shows us divine justice being exercised at two different levels. First of all, in our present life a certain rough justice can be seen at work. Its reality can be more clearly felt in proportion as we consider a more important group and a longer period of time. It is from this reality that we are bound to deduce the existence of original sin : a state of separation from God, which causes in the whole race the act of separation freely committed by sinning. This limping justice is not, moreover, the sole principle which explains the facts of man's condition : alongside it room must be found for God's plan of testing and educating his creatures. After the present life retribution will be administered according to merits, a retribution no longer crude and irregular, but enjoying a perfect delicacy, subtlety and precision. No inspired author has made an explicit application of this latter principle to original sin.

A. M. DUBARLE, O.P.

*Le Saulchoir*

#### THE DATE OF THE LAST SUPPER

The date of the Last Supper is one of the most notorious difficulties in the New Testament. The synoptic gospels describe it as a Paschal meal, while John tells us that the Jews were to eat the Pasch the next day, the day Our Lord died—they refused to enter Pilate's court lest they be defiled and so debarred from eating the Pasch. Commentators have generally been content to opt for either John's date or that of the synoptics, and then to suggest explanations of how the other dating came about. Another solution, attempting to justify both methods of dating, was to suggest that there may have been two ways of reckoning the Pasch, and that Our Lord was following one, described by the synoptics, and the 'Jews' who put Our Lord to death were following another, and it is to this that St John refers. This theory would certainly be very convenient, if true ; but it sounds rather too convenient—as if, in fact, it were invented in order to solve the difficulty. Certainly the arguments hitherto used to support it have failed to carry conviction. Recently, however, new arguments

have been brought forward which it is suggested give an objective foundation to the theory. The arguments are based on the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>1</sup>

It has long been recognised that the calendar was a point on which the Qumran sect felt very strongly; this was one of the points on which they were fiercely opposed to the official Jewish priesthood, and several passages in the documents exhort their followers to preserve jealously their own calendar and their own manner of reckoning the liturgical feasts. They even refer to the book on which their calculations are to be based—it is the *Book of Jubilees*, many fragments of which were found at Qumran. Without entering too much into technicalities concerning this calendar, we can say this much: the year was a solar year of exactly 364 days, which divided up into exactly 52 weeks—which means that 1 January would always be the same day of the week; if the year began on a Monday, the next year would begin exactly 52 weeks later on a Monday again. Further, the year was neatly divided into four parts, each having two months of 30 days plus one of 31 days; again, an exact number of weeks (13 each quarter), so that each quarter would begin on the same day of the week. In other words, if we knew the day on which any feast fell in any year, we could immediately tell on what day of the week it would fall in any other year. Now, by a series of complicated calculations (which we certainly will not go into, see note 1), it has been worked out that the year, according to this calendar, began on a Wednesday, and that the Pasch also fell on a Wednesday.

What is the history of this calendar? It seems probable that it is an old priestly calendar—how old, it is as yet impossible to say. In Hasmonaean times the ordinary lunar calendar of 365 days was adopted. This gradually became current, but seemed like apostasy to the more zealous among the Jews, another lapse into hellenist ways. Among such circles the older calendar would remain current, and even, as we see from the Qumran documents, be a source of violent disagreement from the official priesthood.

Now how does this affect our reading of the gospels? According to the Old Testament the paschal lamb had to be eaten on the evening of the 14th Nisan, the next day, the 15th, being the Pasch, a feast which continued for a week. On the first and seventh days no servile work was permitted. The same week was also the feast of the Azymes—on the afternoon of the 14th Nisan the house was scrupulously

<sup>1</sup> The originator of this theory is A. Jaubert; for more detailed information the reader is referred to her articles, 'La date de la dernière Cène,' in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, CXLVI (1954), 140-73; 'Le Calendrier des Jubilés et de la Secte de Qumran,' in *Vetus Testamentum*, III (1953), 250-64. The latter is summarised in *Theology Digest*, v (1957), 67-72. It is discussed by E. Vogt in *Biblica*, XXXVI (1955), 408-13.

cleared of leavened bread, and throughout the week unleavened bread only was permitted. Now all the evangelists agree that Our Lord died on a Friday, the eve of the Sabbath. But for John this day was the 14th Nisan, since the Jews were to eat the paschal victim that night. For the synoptics, on the other hand, Our Lord and His disciples have already celebrated the paschal meal, 'on the night on which he was betrayed' (1 Cor. 11:23); this day, then, was for them the 14th Nisan. The difficulty is solved if we allow that the synoptics are describing the sequence of events according to a calendar similar to that of Qumran; while St John describes events according to the official Jewish calendar, which the Jewish authorities would be following in order to bring out the symbolism of Our Lord, the paschal victim. Thus following the Qumran dating, Our Lord and the disciples ate the paschal meal on Tuesday evening before the Pasch, the 15th Nisan, a Wednesday; for the Jews, Friday evening was the 14th Nisan, the evening on which the paschal meal was to be eaten.

This immediately offers a solution to other difficulties also. In the first place, it must be recognised that the events described in the gospels are with difficulty squeezed into the course of one night and a morning: the paschal meal, the arrest at Gethsemane, the double trial before the Jews, the trial before Pilate, with a visit to Herod followed by another session before Pilate; and only finally the sentence, procession to Calvary and death.<sup>1</sup> It is of course not absolutely impossible to fit them into the time-scheme which has become traditional, a period of only some fifteen hours; but it is very much easier if we can allow two whole days for the events, from Tuesday evening to Friday afternoon. Further, according to the Mishna, capital cases must be tried during the daytime, and, moreover, sentence could only be passed in a separate session. Hitherto it has either been said that this rule was not in force at the time of Our Lord (the Mishna is a second-century document, though it embodies earlier traditions), or that the Jews in their haste to do away with Our Lord acted illegally. But if we accept the present suggestion, there is once more ample time to allow for all the formalities of the law. Finally, this theory fits perfectly with another curious discrepancy between the synoptics and John. Mark describes the anointing of Our Lord at Bethany after the words, 'The Pasch was to take place after two days'; John says that this anointing took place six days before the Pasch. If we allow that this anointing took place on Saturday, then the Pasch which Mark has in mind is

<sup>1</sup> Mark (15:25) gives the note that Our Lord was crucified at 'the third hour.' This is another difficulty in the chronology of the Passion which the present theory helps to dispel. But since it is not insoluble by other means—see the commentaries *ad loc.*—it seems to be an unnecessary complication to deal with it here.



indeed two days later, and at the same time it is six days before the official Jewish Pasch which St John describes.

The main objection to this would seem to be the completely novel interpretation of the gospel account of Our Lord's last day, or days, on earth. In spite of the disagreements mentioned—particularly the nature of the Last Supper—it has always seemed that all four evangelists agree in packing the last events into the few hours between the last meal and his death the following afternoon. And now we are supposed to say that these events actually took several days. Does this fit with the gospel narrative? In considering this difficulty two factors should be remembered. First, we must bear in mind that the gospels in their present form are not free and original compositions. They are not the beginning but the end of a fairly long process of preaching, teaching and collection of various traditions. The Passion-history itself is probably one of the earliest parts of the gospel to be formed, probably to explain the scandal of the cross and to bring out the central doctrine of the Resurrection. But this narrative would probably be quite brief and simple in its original form; and in the course of time other elements would be added to it—added, moreover, without much in the way of careful reshaping and editing but rather merely by means of insertion. Take the incident at Bethany just referred to. Mark 14 begins with a reference to the plotting of the Jews; the story of the anointing follows, but there is no organic connection between this story and the preceding two verses; in fact it interrupts the next step in the plot, the collaboration of Judas. Luke, for example (22:1-3), links the two closely together, omitting the story of the anointing (a similar incident to which he has already given in 7:36-50). It seems quite likely that this story of the anointing was inserted at a later stage of the gospel formation, after the bare bones of the Passion-history—plot, betrayal, trial, death—were already formed. Now the same is probably true of other incidents in the present form of the gospel of the Passion.<sup>1</sup> And while this by no means discredits the trustworthiness of these 'secondary' elements, it does mean that we can allow ourselves more latitude in estimating their historical connection with the main thread of the story.

In any case, of course—this is the second consideration—the main purpose of the evangelists was not to give an historically connected account. This is a statement which must be understood very carefully. It does not mean that the evangelists were not concerned to give a factual account of what happened. But they were not concerned to

<sup>1</sup> For the 'criticism' of the Anointing at Bethany, see V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (1953), 529 f.; for his discussion of the whole chronology of the Passion, see 524 f., and Additional Note J, 653-64.

give a history, a chronicle, a diary of the events as they happened. Their main purpose was theological—what precise theological point they had in mind may be stated with slight variations by different interpreters,<sup>1</sup> but there is no doubt about the main fact. The evangelists are not writing history for the sake of history; they are writing history, but for the sake of the theological meaning which God has inserted into it. This means that although they will neither invent facts nor falsify the facts at their disposal, they will feel a certain liberty in their arrangement of the facts and in their manner of telling them, and will be relatively unconcerned with precise details of place and time. This happens continually throughout the gospels. Quite early on in Our Lord's life Matthew describes three conflicts with the Pharisees (Matt. 12:1-30)—when the disciples were plucking ears of corn, when he healed the man with the withered hand, and 'then' when he cast out the devil from the dumb man. Luke agrees with Matthew for the first two incidents, but gives the third very much later, during his journey to Jerusalem (Luke 11:14-23). No-one would accuse either evangelist of being untrustworthy—neither of them is concerned primarily with the precise historical sequence of events, and Matthew's 'then' is not to be taken too literally; it means simply, the next incident which he chooses to narrate. And the same is true of the history of the Passion. The evangelists are intent on the history of salvation; the incidents they narrate are selected and arranged with this in mind; and considerations of chronology are of secondary and negligible importance.

The evangelists, therefore, will agree on the main facts—that Our Lord was betrayed, tried by the Jewish authorities, found guilty of nothing else than of being the Messiah, handed over to the Roman governor and condemned to die. This is sufficient for their main theological purpose. They will not then be very much concerned with details—when exactly the trial took place, how many trials there were, when exactly the various details took place (denial of Peter, insulting by the priests), how long the trial before Pilate took and so on. They will even feel free to describe these details from different points of view—Luke's account of Peter's denial is different from that of the other gospels. They will feel free to pass over one or other of them—only Luke tells us of the visit to Herod, only John tells us about the visit to Annas. We need not feel any difficulty, therefore, about accepting a theory which demands expanding the compressed account of the Passion given in the gospels. We should expect to find that it

<sup>1</sup> As an example of different ways of looking at the theology of salvation in the New Testament itself, see the articles by D. M. Stanley, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, xviii (1956), 231-54; 345-63.

#### THE DATE OF THE LAST SUPPER

has been compressed ; and in fact, as we have already seen, we should already have suspected that it was unduly compressed and be far from unwilling to find some means of relieving the pressure.

The chronology of the Passion, then, on the basis of the gospel account combined with the Qumran calendar, would be as follows :

*Saturday night* : anointing at Bethany ('two days' before Mark's Pasch ; 'six days' before John's).

*Sunday* : solemn entry into Jerusalem, Palm Sunday ; return to Bethany.

*Monday* : return to Jerusalem, cursing the fig tree on the way.

*Tuesday* : to Jerusalem again ; fig tree withered ; preparation of the Pasch ; Last Supper, which was a paschal meal according to their calendar, but not for the Jewish authorities who were therefore free to arrest Our Lord that night in Gethsemane and take him to the house of Annas. It is probably during this night session that Peter's denials took place, so that at the end, as he was being led off for the next stage, at cock-crow, the Lord turned and looked at Peter (Luke 22:61).

*Wednesday* : at cock-crow, plenary session of the court before Pilate. Probably here, when the formalities were over, the mockery of Our Lord took place.

*Thursday* : another session of the court early in the morning, merely to pass sentence according to the Mishna ruling ; Our Lord taken to Pilate, who after a preliminary inquiry sent him on to Herod.

*Friday* : second appearance before Pilate ; this was the 14th Nisan according to the official calendar, so the Jews refused to enter Pilate's court ; the whole morning given up to wrangling before Pilate, the incident of Barabbas, the scourging and condemnation ; and finally, the Crucifixion.

This interpretation is so novel that some people will be inclined to condemn it on that ground alone ; 'Untraditional,' they will say firmly and consider that this is sufficient condemnation. But is it so untraditional ? The *Didascalia Apostolorum* (a work of about the third century which incorporates even earlier documents) bears traces of a similar tradition. It explains the fast days of Holy Week by connecting them to the various events of the Passion, which it describes in the following order : on *Tuesday* evening the Last Supper, then the arrest of Our Lord ; *Wednesday*, detention in the house of Caiphas and council of priests ; *Thursday*, appearance before Pilate, by whom he was kept in prison that night ; and *Friday*, Pilate condemns him and delivers him up to be crucified. The author is obviously aware of the difficulty arising from John's statement that the Friday was the day

when the Pasch was to be eaten, and offers a far-fetched explanation of how this came about ; but this does not modify the importance of his *independent* witness to a four-day chronology of the Passion. His statement, moreover, is taken up by Epiphanius in the fourth century. Epiphanius clearly depends on the *Didascalia*, but it would be very surprising if he accepted this tradition on the sole grounds of this one source. One might well, then, suspect that the tradition was rather more widespread than our present documentation reveals. This idea receives confirmation from the fact that Victorinus of Pettau, who died in 304, accepts the same tradition in his *De Fabrica Mundi*, and clearly without dependence on the *Didascalia*. Not very much evidence, one might say. But the important thing to notice is that it is completely independent of the gospels ; this tradition could not have arisen from a reading of the gospel texts—and it must have an origin somewhere. Whereas the whole body of contrary tradition, holding the normal chronology of a Last Supper and arrest on the Thursday night followed by trial and death on the Friday, is entirely based on the gospel text. Now we have already seen that the gospel text does not necessarily demand this interpretation and is not irreconcilable with a longer chronology ; therefore the tradition which depends on the gospel text is likewise not necessarily binding. A tradition which depends on the gospel text cannot be used to support that text itself. Moreover, since the shorter chronology is the natural and simple way of regarding the gospel account, if there were no other evidence to the contrary, it can quite easily be understood that a tradition which at first sight appeared to conflict with the gospel account should fairly soon have disappeared. We hear no more of it, explicitly, after Epiphanius in the fifth century.

It will be agreed that this theory offers a better solution to the difficulties of the gospel text than any other so far suggested. It does not depend on any arbitrary alteration of the date of the Pasch by either Our Lord or the Jewish authorities, but rests on the evidence of a calendar we know did exist. But it cannot yet be said to have been proved conclusively. In the first place, the calendar on which it rests was that of the community of Qumran ; but we do not know that Our Lord and his disciples followed it. Against this it should be admitted that there is a steadily growing body of evidence which points to fairly close contact between the Qumran sect and early Christianity. We need not say that this contact was direct and immediate ; nor do we need to say the same concerning the calendar. It would be sufficient to say that the Qumran documents show us that there were ideals and ideas current in Israel in the first century which are not reflected in the documents of official Judaism ; and that it is quite possible that Christianity drew its first followers from circles

which had at least as much in common with these 'marginal' elements as with official Judaism. In other words, we do not need to say that Our Lord followed the calendar of Qumran; all we need to say is that we now know there was such a calendar, that it may well have been current in other places besides the Qumran community, and that Our Lord may have followed this body of opinion which preferred the ancient priestly calendar to the later official civil calendar. It must be admitted, however, that the words 'may be' occur rather too often in such an explanation for us to be quite certain about it.

A second point on which we would like further explanation is the question of intercalated days. Even in our year of 365 days we have to insert an extra day every few years in order to make up for the fact that the year is actually slightly longer than 365 days. In a year of 364 days the difference between the days and the seasons of the year would become more noticeable even more quickly than in our year. This would be of particular importance in a calendar which was meant to preserve the regularity of the liturgical feasts, when those feasts were so closely connected with the seasons. If the year were computed inflexibly according to 364 days, there would come a time when they were celebrating the offering of first fruits before the seed was even sown. Moreover, if they were to preserve the regularity of the recurring days (New Year's day always falling on the same day of the week), it could not be a question of inserting merely one day, as we do in our calendar. At least a complete week, if not a complete month, would have to be inserted. Now we have as yet no information how or when this was done. Therefore, in spite of the apparent mathematical certainty of the computation of the Qumran calendar, we cannot be absolutely sure of the occurrence of any given feast in any given year. We know that the Pasch, the 15th Nisan, would certainly be a Wednesday; but we do not know if it would necessarily be in the same week as the official Jewish 15th Nisan.

For the moment, then, this theory must remain no more than a very attractive possibility.

L. JOHNSTON

*Ushaw*

## THE REMISSION OF SINS—II

4 *Remission of sins through penitential practices* Judging by the writings of the early fathers it seems undeniable that the question of how the grave sins committed after Baptism were to be forgiven created something of a dilemma; not, be it clearly stated, in the sense

that the answer to that question was not to be found in Divine Revelation, but in so far as new circumstances always create dilemmas for those who have not fully penetrated the wonderful plan of God's salvation through Christ. There must have been many who long before St Augustine said much the same as he: 'Since we have to live in this world, in which life without sin is impossible, the remission of sins does not consist solely in the washing of holy Baptism.'<sup>1</sup> But for the early church, so devoted to the Sacred Scriptures, there was clear guidance to be found in the Old Testament,<sup>2</sup> and they were not slow to realise it.

Throughout the Old Testament we read of God's chosen people falling into sin, turning away from God and suffering the consequences. And there is the spectacle of God's continually forgiving them their sins and restoring them to their privileged position as His own personal possession among all the peoples of the earth (cf. Exod. 19:5). The similarity between the sinful Israelite and the sinful Christian is clear. Both were members of God's chosen people: the former because he had been incorporated through circumcision into Israel, whom God had led out from Egypt and established in Canaan, united to Himself by the Covenant and enjoying the privileges of being His chosen people; the latter because he had been incorporated through Baptism into Christ, the Son of God in whom is salvation. If then the Israelites of old had been reinstated after they had sinned, then surely the new Israelites could hope for the same mercy; and the Old Testament described time and time again the way in which this reconciliation with God had been effected. Time and again the Israelites had returned to God and been restored to His favour by acknowledging their sinfulness and carrying out various penitential practices. In the Old Testament the Christians found the answer, God's own answer, to their question, 'What can we do, we who have received Baptism once and for all but have since turned away from Thee? What must we do in order that we may regain our place in Thy kingdom?' In order to enter the Kingdom in the first instance they had been told by John, by Our Lord, by the Apostles, 'Turn

<sup>1</sup> Serm. 213,8 (P.L. 38, 1064)

<sup>2</sup> This is an example, only one of many, of the essential part the *Old Testament* has played in the development of Christian theology. We do not mean to imply that the *New Testament* ignores the practice of penance, but there is no doubt that the *Old Testament* makes the more considerable contribution. An examination of textual readings with reference to fasting, for instance, is interesting and perhaps significant—cf. Matt. 17:21 (absent from *Vaticanus* and others, accepted by Merk (2nd edn 1935) but rejected by *Bible de Jérusalem*); Mark 9:29; Acts 10:30; 1 Cor. 7:5. Are these additions to be explained simply by appealing to encratite influence and not, partly at least, to the development of a penitential theology within the Church, of which the encratite heresy itself was an exaggeration?



back<sup>1</sup> and be baptised for the remission of sins.' Now the answer to their question was that they must turn back, be converted, in the manner of the Israelites: a turning to God in sackcloth and ashes, a conversion accompanied by penitential practices. 'Be converted' now became synonymous with 'Do penance.'<sup>2</sup>

The theological significance of penitential practices is not easily demonstrated to everyone's satisfaction, and it seems worthwhile to re-examine the teaching of the Old Testament. But it is essential to bear in mind the Biblical concept of sin,<sup>3</sup> which must be regarded as the foundation of a theology of penitence. According to the Scriptures all evils are the effects and therefore the manifestations of sin; and there is no sharp distinction between material evils and spiritual evils. This is the implication of two fundamental articles of faith: that God created the earth and all the fulness of it, making all things good; and secondly, that Yahweh is the one and the all-powerful God, with nothing beyond His control. These two articles of faith were confronted with the fact that there were many evils in the world, such as poverty, disease, war, famine, drought and death. Only one explanation held good on the lips of a people to whom the subtleties of Greek philosophy were unknown: these evils were, as everything else, in the hand of God: they must be under His control. Yet God was supremely good. These evils then could only be the just punishment of sin, and all suffering was the result of sin, and indeed the external proof of sin. Fasting, the wearing of sackcloth, the sprinkling of ashes upon the head, the renting of garments, the shedding of tears were all practices adopted by the Israelites in times of distress when they turned to God to beg for relief. But the distress, whatever it was, was the result of sin; in turning to God for relief, therefore, they were always and inevitably turning to God for forgiveness of their sins.

There are many examples of such practices. Thus, for instance, when King Achab heard of the murder of Naboth 'he rent his garments, put on sackcloth, even next his skin, fasted, slept in sackcloth and walked slowly' (1 Kings 21:27). The king, accustomed to wear fine linen, to dine sumptuously and to sleep in his ivory-encrusted bed, takes on the role of the poorest beggar to be seen outside his palace gate, clothed in the roughest of garments, emaciated and dragging himself along with painful steps. The evil of Naboth's murder had

<sup>1</sup> According to Behm it is useless to seek the N.T. meaning of *metanoiein* from Greek sources (cf. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, iv, 976, 15). This is not to deny that a change of mind or heart is included within the N.T. significance, but it implies all that is contained within the prophetic use of *šûb*, to turn back, to return, or, as we might say, to be converted (cf. *ibid.* 994, 31).

<sup>2</sup> Notice how the translation of *metanoiein* and *metanoia* fluctuates between 'repent' and 'do penance' in the various versions.

<sup>3</sup> cf. T. Worden 'The Meaning of "Sin"', in *Scripture*, ix (1957), pp. 44-53

not actually caused him to be reduced to this physical state. Achab could have continued his regal life in such a way that the onlookers would have said, no evil has befallen him. But Achab knew better ; he knew that by his sin evil had really befallen him, and he wished to acknowledge and proclaim it as best he could before God and his people. The latter learned of his sin when he appeared as a penitent ; God, who reads the heart, already knew, but He was waiting for that clear acknowledgement of it which would not only move Him to pity, but which would provide Him with the opportunity of manifesting to His people His power and His mercy. And by his penitence Achab won God's forgiveness : ' Because he has humiliated himself before me, I will bring no evil (upon his house) during his time ' (1 Kings 21:29).

The consequences of sin afflict the whole community, and Israel had a vivid sense of the common responsibility. Thus, for instance, Palestine was invaded by locusts. If modern experience is a reliable guide, this was not in itself a very unusual occurrence, but it naturally brought distress and famine. Since God is Lord of all things, then He must have sent the locusts ; but He could not have done this if the people had not sinned. They must therefore beg His forgiveness, and to do so they must approach Him in the full display of their wretchedness :

Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. . . . Be confounded, O tillers of the soil ; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine withers, the fig tree languishes. . . . Gird on sackcloth and lament, O priests, wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God. . . . Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders, and all the inhabitants of the land, to the house of Yahweh your God, and cry to Yahweh. . . . Unto Thee, Yahweh, I cry. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field. Even the wild beasts cry to Thee because the water brooks are dried up and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness. Blow the trumpet in Zion ; sound the alarm on My holy mountain ! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of Yahweh is coming. . . . Who shall endure it ? Yet even now, says Yahweh, return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning ; and rend your hearts and not your garments. (Joel 1:8-2:13.)

Thus the people who were beginning to suffer from the effects of the plague and already going hungry were called upon to accentuate the signs of their distress before the Lord. When God looked upon them in their wretchedness, hungry, weeping, clothed like beggars, and heard their cry : ' Pity, Yahweh, for Thy people ! ' then He must surely have mercy. In actual fact He once more showed mercy to them : ' Look, I am sending you grain, wine and oil, and you will be satisfied ' (2:19).

Again, the Jews after the return from exile sinned grievously by marrying outside their own race. In Nehemias ch. 9 we read of how they begged from God forgiveness for their sins. Clothed in sackcloth and with dirt upon their heads they gathered together for a fast. Standing there in their misery they sang of all the wonderful deeds God had accomplished for them in the past. Again, when Judith sought God's help against the enemies of her people, she fell flat upon her face, scattered ashes upon her head, uncovered the sackcloth she was wearing, and with a loud voice cried to the Lord (Judith 9:1). In the same way Daniel, lamenting the desolation of Jerusalem, turned his face to God, seeking Him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes (Dan. 9:3). The voluntary adopting of these penitential practices is the regular accompaniment to prayer in time of distress, whether an explicit acknowledgement of sin be included or not. There is no indication that by afflicting themselves with fasting, sackcloth and ashes the Israelites thought that this suffering 'satisfied' or 'placated' God, or that it was required as compensation for some abstract balance of justice. They did recognise that the evils they were suffering against their will, whether famine or war or anything else, had been justly inflicted upon them by God, and that they were a just punishment for sin. They did recognise that in order to gain an end of the evils caused by their sins they must placate God's wrath and prevail upon Him to 'turn away His anger.' But this is not the same thing as saying that they thought of voluntarily inflicted sufferings as 'satisfying' Him, for the appeal was not to God's justice but to His fidelity to His promises, to His love and compassion. Their references to these penitential practices are not in terms of 'Let them placate Thee: let them make satisfaction to Thee,' but rather, 'Look at our wretchedness and have mercy; see how we suffer and be moved to pity.' It must not be forgotten that these practices were a sincere avowal of sinfulness, and that they were the mark of repentance, for they were only adopted when the people returned to Yahweh to seek His help after having gone astray. Their purpose was to move God to pity, so that He would forgive them their sins by removing the evils that afflicted them.

Some may find this dramatic display of their miseries rather distasteful. They may ask whether there be any reason for dressing in sackcloth, for fasting, especially in those cases when famine was in any case making them go hungry. Why the need for tears and groanings? Are these things necessary to win God's compassion? Does He not already know of their misery without its being thus paraded before Him? Have we here an example of primitive practice which further enlightenment has discredited? This objection is indeed

a fundamental one, and is not to be answered by referring to the primitiveness of the Old Testament. Christianity, the true heir of Israel, has also its dramatic display: the element of drama is as fundamental to Christianity as are the Sacraments. These penitential practices are not mere 'play-acting.' Such appearances were the outward manifestations of their real wretchedness. And they were wretched not because of murder or locusts or war or drought, but because they had offended God. If they had been wretched merely because of these 'natural' causes, they would simply have taken steps to alleviate their wretchedness as much as possible; they would have kept up appearances, they would have eaten whatever food the famine left them. It was only when they voluntarily displayed the effects of these evils, it was only when, hungry though they were they fasted, poor though they were they rent their garments and put on sackcloth, it was only then that the signs of misery became significant for their purpose. It is perfectly true that external appearances may at times be nothing more than play-acting, and the prophets warned them of this. 'Why have we fasted and Thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves and Thou takest no knowledge of it? Behold in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers. Behold you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to Yahweh?' (Is. 58:3-5). The purpose of penitential practices is to come into God's presence suffering and in need; but to fast when there is no real turning away from sin makes a mockery of their protestations of dependence upon Him; He who sins does not believe that God alone can free him from wretchedness (cf. Zach. 7:9-10).

Penitential practices were the outward manifestations of sin because they were the outward manifestation of the results of sin. To the Israelites the poor man's rags, the drawn face of the hungry, the dirt of the neglected, the tears of the mourner, the diseases of the sick were all evils. They were therefore one and all the result of sin. To say that the poverty was due to a recent war, or the hunger to the failure of last season's rains, or the neglect to the death of parents, or the skin disease to the lack of fresh vegetables, none of these explanations would in any way change the Israelites' belief that the ultimate cause was sin. They were not ignorant of these reasons: they knew that they must till the land and conserve their water supply if they were to have sufficient food; they knew that they must practise hygiene to avoid

the ravages of disease ; they knew that they must defend their frontiers from pillaging armies if they were to avoid poverty and destruction. They knew and they did all these things : they were a civilised people living in a civilised part of the world. But they nevertheless believed, as God Himself had taught them to believe, that hunger, thirst, disease and pain were evils, and that no evil which has ever afflicted man has done so independently of sin.

But still we have not answered the difficulty, of the need of such display when it was God's pity they sought. Is not this penitential practice, calculated to move the heart, all too human a manner of behaving when God is the One we petition ? The answer is to be found in the Scriptures where the more fundamental purpose of penitence is seen. The Israelites realised clearly that the only way whereby God can be known by men is through His works ; and so they realised the importance of every scrap of visible, tangible evidence of God's merciful interventions, and they consequently realised the value of underlining that evidence. The purpose of their penitential practices was not only to move God to pity, though this human way of looking at things is perfectly legitimate ; but more fundamentally, it was to underline the power and the love of God displayed in His act of deliverance. To put it somewhat bluntly, their penitential practices were intended to make the setting all the more sombre, in order that God's rescue might stand out all the more clearly and convincingly, and thus strengthen their faith and confidence in His love and mercy for them. All external religion is a divine pedagogy, and this is no accidental or dispensable feature ; it is essential precisely because we cannot know God except in His works among us.

That the Israelites realised this purpose is clear from another and at first sight surprising feature of their penitential practices. Their prayers on these occasions did not begin with cries for mercy but with hymns of praise for all God's wonderful deeds in the past. Thus in Nehemias 9 we read how the people recalled the choosing of Abraham, the rescue from Egypt, the giving of the Law on Sinai, the manna in the desert and the giving of the promised land. It was not as though they had deserved these things ; but even when they had rebelled in the past, God had not abandoned them. Whilst it was true that He had given them into the hand of their enemies when they had sinned, He had rescued them when they had cried out to Him. We find the same in Judith 9 and Daniel 9. These past deeds are the guarantee that God, unchangeably faithful, will act in the same way now, since the opportunity presents itself once more. We are, perhaps, sometimes shocked at the way in which the Israelites asked God to act 'for His own sake,' as though there were some suggestion that God acts from

motives of vainglory. But in reality it is a request that God manifest Himself to the world, and God takes away their distress explicitly for this motive: 'to make Thy name known to Thy adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at Thy presence' (Is. 64:2). Judith ends her prayer: 'And make known to every nation and to every tribe that Thou art Yahweh, God of all power and might, and that the people of Israel has no other protector but Him' (Judith 9:14). God's answer to Israel's prayer for deliverance from the plague of locusts emphasises the same idea: 'You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of Yahweh your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And My people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, Yahweh, am your God and there is none else. And My people shall never again be put to shame' (Joel 2:26-7). Daniel's prayer reminds God of the same motive: 'Yahweh, give heed and act; delay not, for Thy own sake, O my God, because Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name' (Dan. 9:19). The greater the deed and the more spectacular, then the more effective a revelation of God to man it is. And that is why the forgiving of sin and the overcoming of evil are manifestations of God and are to His glory. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the rescuing of them from Babylon, the preservation of the people from the locusts, the saving them from famine and drought, these are all examples of God's power over evil; they were object lessons and for this reason they were presented in dramatic form. Thus their prayer, having begun with a confession of God's greatness, having continued with the confession of their own wretchedness, so often ends with the promise that they will confess God's greatness all the more in the time to come, when they will have a further example of His love to which they may refer. The pedagogical purpose is only attained when God does intervene to rescue them from their misery, and change their grief into joy, their poverty into riches, their famine into abundance. And the Old Testament recounts such acts of God time and again. Penitential practices were never considered as something complete in themselves: they were always means to an end, an end which seems twofold: the forgiveness of sin and the glory of God, but which is in reality one: the glory of God made manifest in the forgiveness of sin. And the manifestation was more brilliant when the sinfulness to be cured by God was more vividly shown forth in penitential sufferings.

5 *Remission of sins through the sacrament of Penance* It is necessary to understand the true significance of penitential practices because they did not lose this significance when they were adopted by the Church



as the means whereby she should exercise the power given her by Christ of forgiving sins. The essential task of the Church is to impart and increase the life of Christ, and the sacraments are the seven ways in which she fulfils her task. Thus sinners who have lost the life of Christ given to them in Baptism are offered that life a second time, provided they ask for it as penitents : in sackcloth and ashes, with supplications and with fastings, provided, that is, they realise and acknowledge that they are suffering the effects of sin, and stand in need of God's merciful intervention. The sinner may, for instance, confess that he committed adultery : he is guilty of an action which took place a day or a year ago ; but he can as accurately confess that he is now, at this very moment, suffering the evil effects of such an action, and this wretched condition may well be displayed by his penitential garb. When a man says that he broke his leg two days ago, he could as well say that he *has* a broken leg *now*, were this not superfluous, since the effects of his action are there for all to see. But the manifestations of sin are not so clear or so definite. It is therefore necessary to adopt certain signs of its presence, if the healing power of God's mercy is to be made plain, and His glory to be enhanced.

In the attitude of the early Christian writers towards the practice of penance we see the influence of the Old Testament (though it is clear that other factors played their part, such as Stoic philosophy and Roman jurisprudence), and the two motives of strengthening the sinner's plea for forgiveness and the pedagogical benefit to the community of the faithful are not difficult to find. Thus Tertullian writes, after having admitted that the gate of forgiveness, though shut and fastened up with the bar of Baptism, is nevertheless standing somewhat open through repentance :

The narrower, then, the sphere of action of this second and only remaining repentance, the more laborious is its probation ; in order that it may not be exhibited in the conscience alone, but may likewise be carried out in some external act. This act, which is more usually expressed and commonly spoken of under a Greek name, is *exomologesis*, whereby we confess our sins to the Lord, not indeed as if He were ignorant of them, but inasmuch as by confession satisfaction is settled ; of confession repentance is born ; by repentance God is appeased. And thus *exomologesis* is a discipline for man's prostration and humiliation, enjoining a demeanour calculated to move mercy. With regard also to the very dress and food, it commands the penitent to lie in sackcloth and ashes, to cover his body in mourning, to lay his spirit low in sorrows, to exchange for severe treatments the sins which he has committed ; moreover, to know no food and drink but such as is plain—not for the stomach's sake, to wit, but the soul's ; for the most part, however, to feed prayers on fastings, to groan, to weep and roar unto the Lord your God ; to roll before the feet of the presbyters and kneel to God's dear ones ; to enjoin on all the brethren to be ambassadors to bear his deprecatory supplication before God. All this *exomologesis* does, that it may enhance repentance ; may honour God by its fear of the incurred danger ; may, by itself pronouncing against the sinner stand in the stead of God's

indignation and by temporal mortification (I will not say frustrate, but) discharge eternal punishment.<sup>1</sup>

Origen also speaks of the possible edification for the rest, when a sinner confesses his sin in the gathering of the whole Church.<sup>2</sup> And the pedagogical element in penitential practice was strongly marked in the early Church, by the fact that the penitent sinner was at the door of the church for all to see. God's intervention, His forgiveness and His mercy were equally plain, for the community witnessed the reconciliation of the sinner by the bishop, the readmission into the Church and especially his readmission to the delights of the Lord's table.

Both by excluding the sinner from the life<sup>3</sup> of the Church and by readmitting him as a penitent, the bishop was exercising the power given by Christ to the apostles when he said: 'Whatever you may bind upon earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you may loose upon earth will be loosed in heaven' (Matt. 18:18). The interpretation of this saying, which is practically identical with what had been said to Peter alone (Matt. 16:19), has always caused considerable difficulty. What is the meaning of 'to bind and loose'? It was a rabbinic expression, used to describe their teaching authority: they could declare certain beliefs or practices forbidden (i.e. bound) and others lawful (i.e. loosed) according to the Law. In this case, then, Our Lord would be giving Peter and the rest of the apostles divine authority to support them in their teaching regarding what was allowed or forbidden by God. As an objection to this interpretation Büchsel<sup>4</sup> points to Matt. 23:8 where the disciples are admonished not to accept the title Rabbi, for 'you have only one teacher,' and he calls attention to another possible meaning of 'to bind and loose,' namely 'to put under a bann and to remove the bann, or to expel from the community and to readmit.' The evidence for such a meaning is slight and Büchsel admits that one cannot go further than to say that it is a probable interpretation of the texts in Matthew. But this may already be too definite. The object of the binding and loosing is

<sup>1</sup> 'On Repentance,' ch. IX, *Anti-Nicene Christian Library*, XI, Edinburgh MDCCLXIX, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> In Ps. 37 Hom. II, 6, edition De la Rue, viii, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> It must be clearly understood that such expressions as 'expulsion from the Church,' or 'exclusion from the kingdom,' or 'to cease to be a member of the Church' are all references to the living or fruitful membership. The baptised sinner *does* remain a member of the Church in so far as he retains a title to membership: he has been stamped, as it were, with an indelible mark at Baptism, and his situation in relation to the Church is not the same as that of one unbaptised. The condemnation of the practice of rebaptising heretics was a tremendous stimulus to the development of a more elaborate theology concerning the nature and effects of the Sacraments, and in particular of that most important distinction between validity and fruitfulness. Thus St Augustine taught that sinners and heretics may have a certain participation with Christ, even though it be imperfect. For this vital development in the understanding of the nature of the Sacraments cf. Bernard Leeming, s.j., *Principles of Sacramental Theology*, London 1956, nn. 135-53.

<sup>4</sup> *Theol. Wört.*, II, 60, 8 ff.

things, not people,<sup>1</sup> and the context of this expression in Matt. 16:19 where Peter is made the head of the Church favours the retaining of its normal meaning as a conferring of doctrinal authority. On the other hand, the context of Matt. 18:18 is precisely that of fraternal correction, of the relation between sinner and community. If a brother sin he is to be rebuked before witnesses; but if he refuse to listen the community is to be informed, and if even then he refuse to listen he is to be as a pagan or a publican, namely one excluded from the community. Here the context does seem to favour the interpretation of to bind and loose as to expel from and readmit to the community, and K. Stendahl remarks with some probability: 'It may not be taken for granted that the saying is intended to have the same function in both contexts. On the contrary, its repetition in ch. 18 is due to the fact that Matthew intends to alter its implications.'<sup>2</sup> But it seems possible to reconcile the two interpretations more simply. Judging by the formula used in both cases, the direct meaning is indeed that Peter and the rest of the apostles are given the authority of deciding what doctrine and what moral conduct is permitted and forbidden in God's kingdom. The Scribes and Pharisees had claimed a similar authority for their interpretations of the Law, and in practice by their interpretations they had closed the kingdom of heaven to men (Matt. 23:13). In the same way the authority given the apostles of preaching the authentic gospel, must also in practice include the authority of excluding from and readmitting to the kingdom which they preach.<sup>3</sup> The interpretation of this text, therefore, from the time of Tertullian<sup>4</sup> and Origen,<sup>5</sup> as a reference to the power of the bishop to exclude<sup>6</sup> and readmit sinners to the Church, must not be considered as alien to its original context; nor, on the other hand, as directly stated there; but rather, as an important element included in the full doctrinal authority given to the apostles by Christ. If the belief or conduct of a Christian deviate from what is taught by the apostles, then he is no longer a member of the kingdom; if he correct this, then he regains his position in the kingdom. But the kingdom of God is a visible community and every aspect of life in the kingdom has its

<sup>1</sup> The examples Büchsel quotes, namely John 7:39; 10:29; 17:2, 24, to show that this use of the neuter causes no difficulty are quite unconvincing.

<sup>2</sup> *The School of St Matthew*, Uppsala 1954, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> J. Jeremias points out that the rabbinic use of this expression ought not to lead us to ignore completely its origin as signifying the autocratic power of a judge to take prisoner and to release (cf. *Theol. Wört.*, III, 751, 1 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> An interpretation he himself rejected, at least in so far as it was considered to have been handed down to the successors of Peter (cf. *Scripture*, IX (1957), p. 66, fn. 3).

<sup>5</sup> Comm. in Matt. 12:14.

<sup>6</sup> 'Exclusion' from the Church is not to be restricted in this context to the significance of 'excommunication' in the technical sense it now has in the Canon Law.

visible side : the kingdom is preached by the apostles, and its members are admitted by the visible sign of Baptism, which is the manifestation of their invisible belief in the gospel. So too, their deviation from that belief, and their subsequent reacceptance of it, must be made visible.

The expulsion from the Church and the later readmission of the penitent sinner is the sacramental rite whereby sins are forgiven, for the former is the external proof that the man is in the state of sin, and the latter that he is reconciled to the body of Christ and reinstated in the kingdom of God. The grave mistake is sometimes made of regarding expulsion from the Church and readmittance as a purely disciplinary measure, without direct reference to a man's state in relation to God. But this shows a misunderstanding of the significance of the Church as the gathering of those who are saved and who together form the one body of Christ in whom alone is salvation. In the rite of public penitence according to the *Pontificale Romanum* the bishop said to the sinners he was expelling : ' Thus you are, today, driven from your holy mother the Church, on account of your sins and your crimes, as Adam the first man was driven from paradise on account of his sin.'<sup>1</sup> Their penitential garb and particularly their exclusion from the Holy Eucharist made this truth quite obvious to the community, made the penitents themselves realise their unhappy state and their need to seek forgiveness, and made their eventual reconciliation a striking proof of God's merciful intervention, a display of His love ' Who willest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live ' (cf. Ezech. 33:11). It is in such a context that we understand the full implication of the parables of the lost sheep, the lost drachma and the prodigal son<sup>2</sup> : ' There will be more joy in heaven for one sinner who repents, than for ninety-nine just who need not repent ' (Luke 15:7).

It may well be thought that a theological consideration of the remission of sins through Penance which shows so great a dependence upon the practice of the early Church, is proved unsound by the fact that most of these practices have been abandoned by the Church, and are therefore unessential for the preservation of this sacrament. Great changes in the actual rite of Penance have taken place for various reasons which can only be appreciated in a careful study of liturgical history. But it is not correct to conclude that the superficial differences, great though they seem, imply that the theological significance of the sacrament more clearly expressed in ancient practice, does not remain the same today. The absence of sackcloth and ashes, of fasting and weeping, is the reason why the name Penance seems something of a

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by A. Villien, *Les Sacrements : Histoire et Liturgie*, 3e ed., Paris 1931, p. 167

<sup>2</sup> cf. S. Lyonnet, *Biblica*, 1954, p. 484

misnomer, but the name Confession draws attention to that element in the sacramental rite which plays the same part as penitential practices. The explicit confession of sins to the priest is the essential penitential practice demanded by the Church except in those circumstances in which, from the earliest days, the Church has been accustomed to dispense with penitential practices. The confession of sins is the sinner's declaration of the evils which have come upon him through sin, and it is his public humiliation. Through this humiliation the sinner moves God to pity and displays his miserable state to the Church. The confessor is the officially appointed witness on behalf of the Church, and the confession of sins, in spite of the secrecy of the confessional, still remains, essentially, a public one before the Church. But more important, the confessor is the officially appointed representative of the apostles in the sinner's reconciliation, and it is here that the drama is completed, for by this reconciliation God shows His mercy and changes the sinner's sickness into health, a wonderful work of God which is crowned before the eyes of the brethren when the sinner is once more united to them at the reception of the Holy Eucharist. A sure theological instinct joins confession and communion in the minds of the faithful, for the Holy Eucharist is the supreme proof that we are members of the Body of Christ.

The remission of sins therefore, obtained fundamentally through union with Christ, is in practice granted through two sacraments: to those who do not already belong to the Church it is given by Baptism which makes them members of the Body of Christ; to those who have already been baptised it is given by Penance whereby they are reconciled to the Church, or in synonymous terms, readmitted into the Body of Christ. This is wonderfully expressed in the prayer at the reconciliation of penitents, which took place shortly before the baptism of catechumens at the Paschal Vigil: 'Our number grows through those to be reborn; we increase through those who have returned. There is washing with water; there is washing with tears. From the first there is joy at the receiving of those called; from the second there is gladness at the absolution of the penitent. . . . They have eaten, as it is written, the bread of sorrow; they have watered their bed with tears, they have afflicted their heart with mourning, their body with fastings, in order that they might gain the wholeness of soul they had lost.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> cf. A. Villien, *op. cit.*, p. 169

## BOOK REVIEW

P. Giuliano Gennaro, O.F.M., *Lo Spirito di Cristo*. Angelo Belardetti Editore, Roma 1957. Pp. 140. No price given.

Fr Gennaro's short book is a meditative essay in Biblical Theology on the theme of man's supernatural elevation in and through Christ. First investigating the meanings of 'spirit' and 'flesh' in Scripture, he goes on to consider the hypostatic union and its essentially redemptive purpose. Man attains harmony of spirit and flesh through the grace by which he shares in the fruits of the hypostatic union. The author uses, naturally, St Paul for the most part; but not exclusively — patristic references are plentiful, and medieval and modern thinkers are utilised for support or contrast. The approach is literary, at times deliberately lyrical, after the fashion, say, of Guardini. This does not make for easy reading, but it helps to bring out the profound aspects of true Christian Humanism. The book is to be recommended to any moderately proficient reader of Italian, as spiritual reading which will illuminate his study of Scripture and Theology alike, and promote that vision of the renewal of all things in Christ which is so much needed in our times.

J. L. ALSTON



